

4070), passed the House with overwhelming bipartisan support, 425–0. This bill is the culmination of bipartisan effort, as well as the cooperation and support of the Social Security Administration and the Office of Inspector General. The legislation also benefited from prior feedback by advocacy groups and law enforcement agencies. Last, but certainly not least, this bill results in a small amount of savings for both the Social Security trust funds and general revenues.

I urge all Members to cosponsor this important legislation and look forward to bringing this bill to the floor as quickly as possible.

INTRODUCTION OF LEGISLATION PROVIDING IMPROVEMENTS TO SOCIAL SECURITY PROGRAM

HON. ROBERT T. MATSUI

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 12, 2003

Mr. MATSUI. Mr. Speaker, I pleased today to join with Congressman Clay Shaw, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Social Security, to introduce legislation to make important improvements in the Social Security program. These improvements would better protect vulnerable beneficiaries who cannot manage their own benefits; expand access to professional representation for disability claimants; and reduce the vulnerability of the program to fraud and abuse. The bill is very similar to H.R. 4070, which was adopted unanimously in the House last year. Unfortunately, even though the bill later passed the Senate with some minor changes, the House did not take it up again before the 107th Congress adjourned.

This bill was developed as a result of hearings our Subcommittee has held over the past several years, recommendations from the Social Security Administration and its Inspector General, and the concerns of beneficiaries and their representatives. It makes the following changes:

Representative Payees: Some Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries are unable to handle their own benefits, because they are too young, too frail, or otherwise unable to manage their own funds. In such cases, SSA appoints a "representative payee" to manage their benefits. The payee can be a family member or other individual, or an organization. The bill makes improvements in the representative payee system to prevent misuse of beneficiary funds by payees, to increase oversight of payees, and to expand the ability of SSA to repay benefits which are misused by a payee.

Attorney Fees: The bill extends SSA's fee-withholding system to attorneys who represent SSI claimants, so that they could be paid directly by SSA out of the past-due SSI benefits. In this way, more individuals would be able to gain access to professional representation in pursuing their claim. It also caps the user fee that SSA charges for processing attorney payments at \$75.

Program Protections: The bill increases penalties for misrepresenting facts relating to benefit eligibility; denies Social Security benefits to fugitive felons and those in violation of parole or probation; requires companies that offer for a fee services that SSA provides for free to

say so in their solicitations; and makes other changes requested by the Office of Inspector General to prevent fraud and abuse.

The bill also makes other miscellaneous, technical and conforming changes to the Social Security Act.

I want to especially highlight the importance of the attorney-fee changes. Professional representation is a valuable—and indeed vital—service. The disability determination process is complex. Claimants without professional legal representation appear to be far less likely to receive the benefits to which they are entitled. For example, among claimants represented by an attorney, 63.6 percent were awarded benefits at the hearing level in 2000. In contrast, only 40.1 percent of those without an attorney were awarded benefits.

Under current law, when an attorney successfully represents a Social Security disability claimant and that claimant is entitled to past-due benefits, SSA retains a portion of those past-due benefits in order to pay the attorney for the services he or she provided. This system of direct-payment, which is only available to attorneys representing applicants for Social Security disability insurance benefits, helps to promote access to representation by assuring that attorneys receive payment for their services while protecting beneficiaries by capping allowed fees.

The bill makes two important changes to the attorney fee system. First, it extends the direct-payment system to attorneys representing claimants for SSI. Without direct fee payment, SSI claimants are often unable to obtain needed legal representation, as there is no way for attorneys to be assured of payment for their services. Such claimants are often particularly in need of professional assistance, as they have no other sources of income to fall back on should their claim for disability be wrongly denied.

Second, the bill caps the processing fee deducted from the attorney's payment at \$75. Since the adoption of the processing fee in the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (P.L. 106–170), our Subcommittee has conducted two hearings on the long delays involved in paying attorney fees. We have had some success in speeding up payment, but there remains much room for improvement. It is only fair to cap the processing fee if SSA cannot assure timely payment of fees. Hopefully, this cap, in combination with the other provisions of the bill, will also mitigate the loss of experienced representatives from the disability bar, who have been forced to close their practices as a result of delays in fee payments and the imposition of the processing fee.

In closing, I look forward to working with Chairman Shaw on this piece of legislation in the same bipartisan manner that characterized our successful efforts on the Work Incentives Improvement Act, the repeal of the retirement earnings test, and our ongoing efforts to protect the security and privacy of Social Security numbers. With this sort of collaboration, I am certain that we can pass this bill as well.

HONORING PHYLLIS SHAPIRO SEWELL AS A GREAT LIVING CINCINNATIAN

HON. ROB PORTMAN

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 12, 2003

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Phyllis Shapiro Sewell, who will be formally honored on February 26, 2003 by the Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce as a Great Living Cincinnati. The recipients of this prestigious award are selected on the basis of special professional achievement; an awareness of the needs of others; leadership; and distinctive accomplishments.

Bright and well educated, Phyllis graduated from Wellesley College with honors in economics in 1952. She often says she found her first job by perusing the newspaper classified advertisements under "Help Wanted—Female." She could not have imagined then her impact as a pioneer in women's rights in the workplace. As a junior analyst with Federated Department Stores, Phyllis' hard work and dedication set her apart as she began her ascent up the corporate ladder. By the time she was 28, she had been promoted to research director. She spent her entire career at Federated, an \$11 billion corporation operating department stores, discount stores and supermarkets. Phyllis' responsibilities centered on corporate and divisional strategic plans; studies of consumer attitudes and buying habits; and development of effective and information systems.

After retiring from Federated as a senior vice president, Phyllis had a second career serving on several major corporate boards, including Pitney Bowes Inc.; U.S. Shoe Corporation; Lee Enterprises, Inc.; Sysco Corporation; and Huffy Corporation.

Phyllis was named to Business Week's list of top 100 corporate women and to Industry Week's list of top 85 executives. She received Wellesley College's Alumnae Achievement Award in 1979 and was inducted into the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame in 1982.

Devoted to her family, Phyllis is married to Martin Sewell, and they have a son, Charles. Phyllis has also given her talents to the boards of the Cincinnati Jewish Federation; Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati; and United Way.

All of us in Cincinnati thank Phyllis for her service to our community, and congratulate her for being named a Great Living Cincinnati.

TRIBUTE TO VAL ALVARADO

HON. SCOTT MCINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 12, 2003

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise today to pay tribute to Valentino Alvarado of Montrose, Colorado. Val served in the United States Navy for over 23 years and is a veteran of three American wars. Val had been in the Navy less than a year when his ship, the USS Maryland, was hit during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Today, I would like